

# ABOUT GROWTH

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## Tips for public participation events

By John Owen

Partner, MAKERS architecture + urban design

This article outlines tips and suggestions for participation techniques, such as workshops, open houses, and charrettes. These are only one type of participation tool among many that can be used.

In general, we've found the community-wide work sessions to be the single most effective participation tool, but don't limit yourself. Surveys, focus groups, developer forums, and other methods should be considered. A task

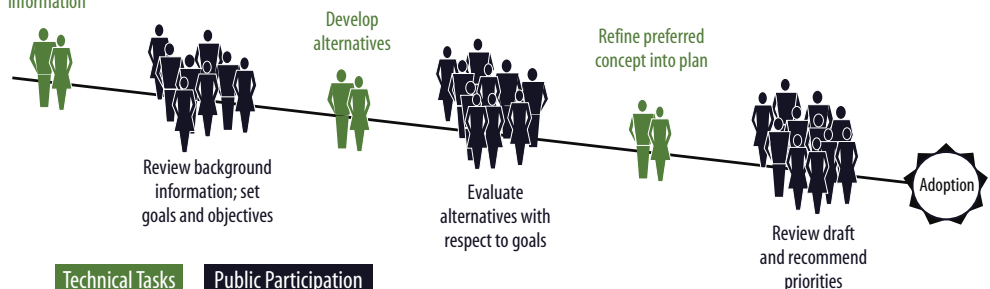
how these three public participation elements fit into the overall process.

During the first public event, you can incorporate a variety of techniques — including brainstorming, visioning, and community preference exercises — to help participants identify the values, characteristics, and goals they think are most important.

It's very useful to start with a presentation of background information identifying where the city/county is in the process and describing existing resources, such as demographics and

Start up; collect  
background  
information

### The Planning/Public Participation Process



group or steering committee directing the project is almost always an invaluable forum in which to hash out technical details or make difficult decisions.

### Integrate public participation throughout the planning process

There's a tendency to front-load public participation into the visioning step and then abandon it as the process moves through the development and decision-making steps. Some communities have tried to outline the basic direction their projects will take through a single intensive "charrette" or work session.

A better approach is to see the participation, or "visioning," as a multistep process tied to the analytical work and, ultimately, the decision-making conclusion.

We find that public involvement is most productive at three key steps in the process: setting goals and objectives, evaluating options, and setting priorities. The diagram above illustrates

market reports, surveys, and physical inventories. We often include a brief mapping exercise to encourage participants to prepare sketches of their ideas for a better future, which we later incorporate into the alternative solutions.

After the first workshop, the planning team develops a set of alternative scenarios for participants to evaluate in the second public event. We find that participants particularly enjoy comparing or critiquing the different alternatives and that they can effectively identify the elements that they prefer and that should be included in the preferred concept. This alternative comparison process mirrors the State Environmental Policy Act analysis steps.

Finally, the third major public event offers the community the chance to review — and, hopefully, ratify — the work that has been done. It's also their chance to establish priorities. An evaluation score sheet or the still popular

# ABOUT GROWTH

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## Martha Choe, CTED Director

CTED administers the state's Growth Management Act. Its role is to assist and enable local governments to design their own programs to fit local needs and opportunities, consistent with the GMA.

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*About Growth* features topics that are of high interest and strives to reflect a wide range of views from various perspectives. The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily CTED's opinions or positions.

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# Changing 'they' to 'we': Effective public decision-making processes

**By Leonard Bauer**  
Managing Director, Growth Management Services



**D**o you know what they're building over there on Main Street?"

"They ought to do something about the traffic over on Rural Road!"

"Did you hear they're going to put a new park in down the

street? They should have done that a long time ago!"

These kinds of comments are often part of conversations over the breakfast table, at the coffee shop, or in the workplace in communities all over Washington. People are very interested in the changes that occur in their communities.

There's one disturbing similarity in many of these conversations, however. Changes, whether unwanted or welcomed, are often attributed to some unidentified individual or group. "They" are responsible for changes (or the lack of them) in the community.

Yet the most successful communities are those that recognize that the future of their community can and should be determined through public decision making. In other words, communities where citizens use the word "we," as in:

"We can work together to support downtown businesses."

"What can we do to provide a safer way for our kids to walk to school?"

That's why the Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) calls for "early and continuous" public participation in all aspects of developing a community's comprehensive plan. A successful comprehensive plan truly reflects the desires and vision of the people living and working in the community, while also considering its role in meeting regional and statewide goals. This kind of plan is more likely to be implemented, as well. Actions that clearly carry out the plan's goals – adoption of regulations, granting permits, constructing public facilities – will continue to receive the support of the community.

Planners and community leaders know that effectively creating and sustaining public decision-making processes is one of the most

important aspects of their job. Yet it can also be challenging. Even in communities where a comprehensive plan received strong support when it was adopted, individual actions to carry out the plan can receive opposition from specific neighborhoods or special interest groups.

As cities and counties throughout Washington are reviewing their comprehensive plans and development regulations, many are re-discovering the importance of sustaining their efforts regarding public decision making. They're recognizing that it's crucial to have continual broad public involvement in planning decisions, not just during comprehensive plan development but also during each implementing action.

In this issue of *About Growth*, we're including some examples of how cities and counties are ensuring public participation as they update their plans and on a continual basis. They're designing public decision-making programs that are effective in their unique community and reminding citizens on a regular basis how various projects around the community are specifically carrying out the vision established in the comprehensive plan. In these and many other Washington communities, "they" is being changed to "we."

## CTED publications can help

*Critical Areas Assistance Handbook: Protecting Critical Areas Within the Framework of the Washington Growth Management Act* offers suggestions to help Washington communities design locally appropriate programs for designating and protecting critical areas. This publication is available on CD-ROM together with other tools to assist with critical area programs, including example ordinances, helpful resources on finding the best available science, and sample findings of fact for adopting ordinances.

*Buildable Lands Program: 2002 Evaluation Report – A Summary of Findings* summarizes the findings from the first buildable lands reports submitted by Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, and Thurston counties.

Another document, *Growth Management Services Annual Report: July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2002*, reports on the activities of Growth Management Services and the progress local governments are making in continuing to achieve the goals of the GMA.

Call 360-725-3000 for more information.



# Tips for public participation events

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"dot" exercise are two ways to identify public priorities.

This final work session goes much more smoothly if the team can demonstrate how the work in the first two sessions has led to the proposed recommendations.

## Consult special interest groups

Work sessions open to the general public are a must, but it's also useful to consult with special interests and populations, such as developers, ethnic groups, and senior citizens. I'm continually impressed with what youth-oriented work sessions can provide. In Wenatchee, middle and high school students were able to quickly identify the streets where pedestrian access was difficult, delineate down to the block where it was unsafe for them to go at night, and describe why certain shopping districts were "lame."

In Eatonville, participants in the general workshops voiced opposition to franchised fast-foot restaurants and chain stores. The team then posed the same questions to high school students. Can you guess the students' top priority for new businesses? All the chains, from McDonald's to Nordstrom. Faced with this information, town leaders decided they would rather have their kids in town than a franchise-free zone – but they still favored some design controls.

## Practice your facilitation skills

Conducting public participation workshops and charrettes is as much an art as a science. So much depends on the facilitator's ability to explain clearly, listen well, encourage group interaction, and manage conflicts that it makes

sense to study ways to improve your facilitation skills.

Courses are fine, but you can learn a lot from watching others and critiquing your own performances. Everybody has their own unique style. Find yours and then learn how to make it work best for you.

Humor can work wonders as a social lubricant or in defusing tense situations, and sometimes it's best to let the group manage itself. I remember an animated work session in Grandview where a belligerent man began to dominate the group's discussions. Then a thin, elderly woman stood up and told him to sit down and be quiet. Decades ago, the woman had been his first grade teacher.

Not all of us have that sense of authority, so we must learn to be light on our feet in difficult situations. And, experience seems to be the best teacher, so practice, practice, practice.

## Make it fun

Work session activities should be designed to be fast moving, enjoyable efforts. Communities have experience with a number of techniques, ranging from the evaluation of photos (useful in defining the town's desired character) to models and mapping exercises. *The Community Planning Handbook* by Nick Wates (2000, Earth Scan Publications) offers a wealth of participation techniques.

If you are trying a technique for the first time, it's a good idea to test it on a small group first. The last thing you want is participants struggling with a confusing exercise.

But, having fun is more than keeping people amused, because preparing a plan is more than just writing a document; it's finding a consensus for important decisions and building teamwork

for implementation. Therefore, the participation should be geared toward encouraging people to know each other better, to work cooperatively, and to understand each other's point of view. And the more enjoyable this process is, the easier it will be.

Successful communities are those that can work together to make sound collective decisions. Public participation in the planning process is an opportunity – perhaps the best opportunity – for communities to learn to work together more effectively.

## Tapping the Internet to communicate with citizens

By James Constantine and Tom Phillips, AICP

Community planning processes are frequently criticized for insufficient citizen involvement, skewed input from selected groups, or for using the wrong tools to obtain opinions.

Used properly, the Internet can be an effective method to reach and educate citizens who are averse or are too busy to attend public meetings.

Combining the high volume of responses with the ability to engage citizens in visual and complex issues gives this tool added value in accurately represented community view.

As the City of Denton, Texas, planning department began preparing a new set of development regulations in 1999, the planners wanted to involve as many citizens as possible in the process. The city of 80,000 people just north of Dallas/Fort Worth is projected to double in population in the next 20 years. Denton had experienced low turnout in early workshops to create the comprehensive plan goals. Planners felt it was imperative to reach beyond the most vocal citizen activists.

In most cases survey participants would be given five choices: four images and a "none of the options" choice. Survey residents were queried on future development possibilities in five areas: existing neighborhoods, new neighborhoods, new activity centers, downtown university core, and employment and industrial areas.

Nearly all of the 997 citizens responding (96 percent) took the survey using the Internet. The remaining four percent took the survey at a kiosk or via paper ballot.

The predominant findings of the survey indicate that Denton residents want future development to include walkable neighborhoods and high-quality building designs.

The citizen committee charged with reviewing the development code used the survey results as a basis in developing the city's new regulations.

Excerpts from *PAS Memo*, July 2001. Jim Constantine is with Looney Ricks Kiss in Princeton, N.J. Tom Phillips, formerly with the firm, now works for the Seattle Housing Authority.



COURTESY OF MAKERS

Wenatchee students plan for their town's future.

# Design Stanwood – Empowering a community for positive change

By David Pelletier, AIA  
Architect, Pelletier + Schaar

At the start 2002, the Town of Stanwood found itself at a crossroads in its development. For most of its first 100 years, Stanwood had seen little growth or change.

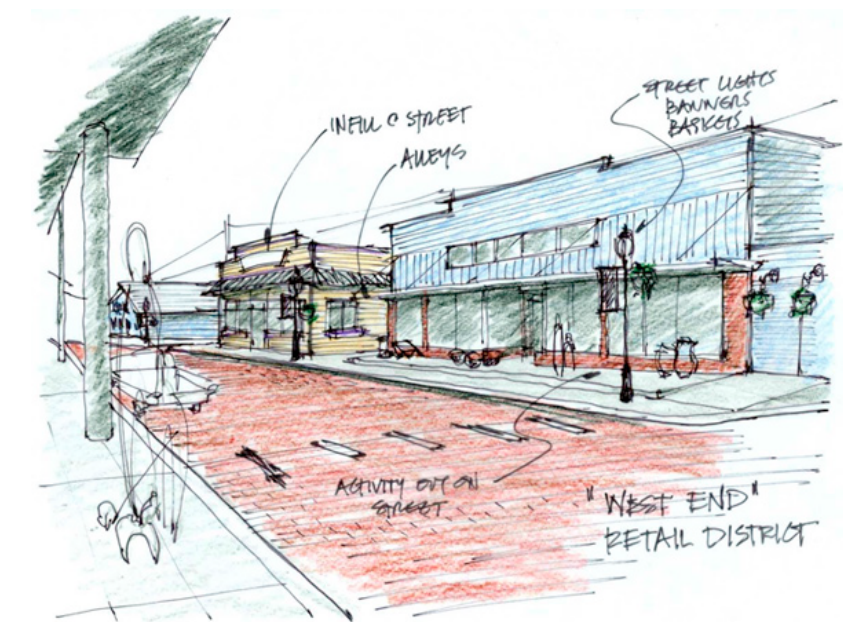
However, the small, hamlet character of Stanwood and neighboring Camano Island began to make the area an attractive place to live. Newcomers flooded in. As the growth pressure increased, an innovative approach to planning was needed.

How could a hub like Stanwood, with a population of 4,000, deal with the need to serve an area with a population of 40,000 and growing?

Stanwood chose a Design Assistance Team (DAT) to assist the community with its visioning. Developed by the national American Institute of Architects (AIA) and recommended by the Northwest Washington Chapter of AIA, the program helps small communities steer growth. The process emphasizes community input to create a vision that the community can embrace.

A three-day DAT was suggested. The program coincided with the update of Stanwood's comprehensive plan. The city planning department saw the DAT process as an ideal way to solicit citizen input for the plan's revision.

A DAT steering committee crafted a mission statement, set a schedule for the



program, and selected architects. CTED provided a grant of \$10,000 to contribute to the cost of the project.

By early spring, the DAT Team was ready for the event, called Design Stanwood. During the first day, 37 community leaders presented information to the team. By the end of the weekend, the community had become excited by the idea of offering public forums and workshops.

After the information gathered was reviewed, the DAT Team offered strategies.

People not only wanted to preserve open space as wild spaces but also as places

where people could congregate and enjoy the natural amenities of the area.

Stanwood had originally developed as two separate towns. Although the areas were joined by incorporation in the 1960s, they remain separated by a large open space and never physically grew together.

The DAT Team visited each neighborhood and the open space between and interviewed people who live and work in each area. To help connect the neighborhoods, the team suggested that a civic commons or shared area be developed between the two districts. In addition, development within the each distinct should complement the scale and character of each area.

To the south of Stanwood, the highway was widened and improved to serve the area's growing population. The expanded artery cuts off access to the river. The team suggested a connection to the river through a series of traffic nodes and pedestrian crossings.

One month after the DAT event, the findings were published in a report, which was made available to the public. The activities also spawned several action committees. These committees are continuing to work on community issues.

The vision and feedback from Design Stanwood created a sense that citizens can be empowered to bring about change in their neighborhoods that reflect the ideals and qualities they believe in.



Citizens discuss their vision for the Town of Stanwood.

COURTESY OF THE TOWN OF STANWOOD



# Community Conversations – Kirkland 2022

By Teresa Swan

Senior Planner, City of Kirkland

Though we currently make up 25 percent of Kirkland's population, we are 100 percent of its future," Collette Harris, Kirkland Youth Council co-chair said of role of young people in Community Conversations – Kirkland 2022. "The visions and dreams of the youth today will be tomorrow's reality."

Youth was one of the targeted groups in the City of Kirkland's community outreach program for the ten-year update of its comprehensive plan. The program's purpose was to ask the community about its preferred future for Kirkland over the next 20 years, tailored around a video and questions.

The unique program offered three ways to participate: attend a meeting, access the city's Web site (the video was streamlined on the site and responses were e-mailed to the city), or watch the video on the city's cable channel (responses were mailed or phoned in).

Most of the 51 community conversation meetings were facilitated and hosted by members of the community rather than by city officials. Altogether, 952 people participated in the program, including 381 young people.

The conversations occurred in September and October 2002 and then culminated in a citywide meeting to review the results of all of the responses and to discuss what changes may need to be made to the city's vision and key goals for 2022. The responses are now guiding the changes to Kirkland's comprehensive plan.

The program involved contacting potential hosts for the community conversations, developing key questions to ask the community, and then scripting and making a video. The program's three questions were focused on: (1) housing, workplace, shopping, and transportation systems, and



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF KIRKLAND

**Kirkland residents could attend a meeting, use the city's Web site, or watch a video then respond by mail or phone to give their opinions on how city housing needs should be met.**

city services needed to support the livable community, (2) how to pay for them, and (3) protection of critical areas given the growing population and jobs.

The video was used as an introduction to community conversations. It began with Kirkland of 20 years ago contrasted with Kirkland of today to emphasize change over time. Futuristic clips about flying cars, unusual city designs, and leading edge technology in homes were included to spark people's imagination. The video then highlighted various issues facing Kirkland today and in the future with potential solutions to these problems.

The program was designed to reach a large number of people from all sectors of the community, including young people and others who don't typically participate in city outreach programs.

Residents who didn't want to attend a meeting could participate at home by accessing the program on the city's Web site or cable channel. The business community used the program as an opportunity to develop ideas on how to improve the economy

and to discuss what future industries should be encouraged.

The program provided business owners with the tools to consider the possible effects of the future on their businesses so they could project their actions accordingly, said Scott Becker, director of The Greater Kirkland Chamber of Commerce.

Local schools were contacted to show the video, have a discussion, and answer the questions in the classroom.

Comments from students at one elementary school were most enlightening: "The thing I like most about Kirkland is that the way it's not too crowded but it's not too empty either, it's right in the middle," said one student.

# Variety of public outreach options available for updating city plans

By Bryan Snodgrass

Principal Planner, Vancouver Long Range Planning Department

Reviewing and updating local comprehensive plans typically involves a range of land use, economic, environmental, service, and other issues as a community looks ahead and tries to anticipate and shape its future.

The GMA requires "early and continuous public participation" as part of this process. In practice, however, it can be difficult to generate significant community interest in legislative changes that don't focus on a particular development proposal or road improvement. Cities in particular face communication challenges, since they don't have final decision-making authority on urban growth area boundary changes, often the most hot button issues in comprehensive plan updates.

The City of Vancouver was faced with these issues, and constrained resources, when it began updating its first GMA comprehensive plan in 2000. A draft update was published in August 2003, with adoption hearings scheduled this fall. A number of approaches have been used for public participation and outreach during this time:

- **ADVISORY COMMITTEE:** A ten-member committee of citizens, stakeholders, planning commissioners, and city and county elected officials met monthly from summer 2000 to 2003 to develop policy recommendations and review initial plan drafts.
- **OPEN HOUSES:** A short series of conventional open houses to share information with the public and answer questions was scheduled in spring 2001, in the early developmental stages of the process. A second series is scheduled for fall 2003 as the draft comprehensive plan is finalized.
- **FOCUS GROUPS:** Four professionally moderated focus group sessions were held in summer 2002 at varying locations throughout the city. Panels of ten to 12 randomly selected local residents from East, Central, and West Vancouver were asked to weigh in on specific planning and growth issues. A citywide business community panel was also convened.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF VANCOUVER

Through advisory committees, open houses, focus groups, and a Web survey, Vancouver is gathering information on neighborhood livability.

- **WEB SURVEY:** A list of several hundred community residents and stakeholders was compiled in 2003, and an e-mail survey of planning issues was conducted, with a response rate of more than 75 percent. Although not entirely random, the survey respondents represent a cross section of the community, and the interactive format allows for in-depth questioning and future follow-up.

These basic approaches were augmented with a variety of presentations before community or stakeholder groups and newspaper and newsletter advertising. Vancouver has also had the benefit of participating in several public events sponsored by Clark County related to the comprehensive plan update.

So what was learned from these outreach efforts? As expected in a community of 150,000 persons, opinions vary, but a few general trends are evident:

- Large segments of the Vancouver community are concerned about the pace of recent growth and the need to adequately plan and provide services.
- Traffic congestion, economic development, and neighborhood

livability issues all emerged as major concerns.

Within these broad issues were more specific ideas:

- The focus groups revealed broad support for use of Vancouver's historic resources and heritage as an economic development tool.
- The Web survey showed support for development of existing facilities and lands before developing new areas.
- The exploration of design issues received support at various stages.

On the process side, we're learning that no one outreach approach is perfect and that new media and technology are providing new options. Incorporating community concerns and monitoring changes over time will be critical for the finalization of Vancouver's updated comprehensive plan in fall and winter 2003 and its following implementation.

More information about the Vancouver comprehensive plan and the public process surrounding it is available at [www.ci.vancouver.wa.us/longrangeplanning/COVCompPlanUpdateOverviewNEW.htm](http://www.ci.vancouver.wa.us/longrangeplanning/COVCompPlanUpdateOverviewNEW.htm).



# Context sensitive solutions: What is it and is WSDOT doing it?

By Julie Mercer Matlick

WSDOT Community Partnership Program Manager

Context sensitive solutions (CSS) is a philosophical transportation project approach quickly spreading across the country, including at the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

CSS basic premise is to consider and respect the "context" in which a transportation project is planned, designed, and/or built whether it's urban, historic, scenic, or rural. It emphasizes collaboration and balancing needs.

Although this is just one of a number of community partnering initiatives underway by WSDOT, it's gaining rapid momentum for use in:

- Examining policy changes.
- Evaluating project development processes.
- Making changes to establish better partnering relationships and to expedite project delivery.
- Creating better urban design approaches.
- Developing training for WSDOT and partnering agencies.

The most recent CSS publication, *Building Projects that Build Communities*, is a set of recommended best practices. The document was developed through a community partnership forum (cities, counties, Federal Highways Administration, Sound Transit, WSDOT staff, and consultants) that provided input on the best ways to expedite project delivery.

But it doesn't stop there; the document provides suggestions on how to balance partnering agencies, affected businesses, community leaders, and other interested parties' needs.

Any group or agency working with WSDOT can gain valuable insights into good approaches to working with the agency.

*Building Projects that Build Communities* was showcased as a model for successful teamwork by the Transportation Action Committee (TRANS-action) for the Upper Yakima Valley. The group, made up of local business leaders, elected officials, WSDOT, local jurisdictions, and other community members met over time and developed a common goal.

That goal was to encourage economic vitality by developing a list of prioritized transportation strategies to meet the long-range needs of the greater Yakima area and explore funding opportunities for the identified projects. After jointly prioritizing the region's three top strategies, preliminary design options were developed. The group is now doing outreach to the community and legislative leaders to seek funding.

The best practices guide contains:

- Project process approach information.
- Pointers on how to build successful teams.
- How to work through the design, review, and approval processes.
- How to plan and get a project built.
- Team evaluating/adjusting/improving.
- Case studies.
- Numerous tools and resources.

WSDOT is also undertaking two new CSS related initiatives.

The first is a transportation urban design "companion" document to WSDOT's *Design Manual*. Its development is being guided by a group of local, state, and federal representatives. The purpose is to provide transportation design practitioners with urban design options while understanding the trade-offs of various designs.

The second is a CSS training program. The training includes modules on communication techniques, conflict resolution, design options, and risk and tort liability. WSDOT staff and local agency staff will be invited to attend.

Contact Julie Mercer Matlick for more information at 206-440-4672 or [matlicj@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:matlicj@wsdot.wa.gov). To order copies of *Building Projects*, call 360-705-7386, or see [www.wsdot.wa.gov/biz/csd](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/biz/csd).

## Public interest in historic properties is high

By Greg Griffith

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

When Congress enacted the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966, it understood the interest, sometimes passion, that the public has for protecting historic places and the need to provide a venue for opinions to be expressed.

In shaping the National Register of Historic Places program, the drafters of the NHPA recognized that historic places compose the fabric of our communities. As a result, the National Register allows anyone to nominate a property. However, private property owners are notified of nominations and have an opportunity to comment on and object to a listing of their property.

A state advisory board reviews all nominations to ensure that nominated properties meet the National Register criteria. In Washington, the State Advisory Council on Historic Preservation meets three times each year. Meetings are open to the public who are invited to comment on National Register and Washington Heritage Register nominations.

Listing of properties onto a local register of historic places is a public process that provides for review and comment by the public in front of a local historic preservation or landmarks commission.

The NHPA provides for public participation in the Section 106 process. Section 106 refers to the environmental review process for historic resources by mandating that all federal agencies take into account the effect of their actions on properties listed in, or eligible for listing in, the National Register. Regulations established by the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation require agencies to establish a public participation plan, particularly important for controversial projects.

The 106 regulations also require that a reasonable effort be made to contact interested Native American tribes and offer them an opportunity to participate in the project planning process.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WSDOT



WSDOT is forming partnerships with local governments, such as the City of Lacey, when developing and building projects in their communities.

# Outreach to Hispanic community highlights Mount Vernon citizen participation efforts

By Evie Berk

Commercial Projects Manager,  
Mount Vernon Development Services

**T**he City of Mount Vernon is making a commitment to reach out to the community.

One of the city's ventures has been the Hispanic Community Outreach. In 2003, through a partnership with a University of Washington Urban Planning and Design graduate class, we were presented with a unique opportunity to connect with our Hispanic community, which now represents 25 percent of Mount Vernon's population.

Through two Hispanic Community Outreach workshops, a number of issues and concerns were voiced and from those, strategies developed. Members of the Hispanic community, representatives from the English as a Second Language program at Skagit Valley College as well as planning commissioners and planning division staff participated. Flyers in both Spanish and English, bilingual radio and newspaper ads, and postings on the city's Web site were among the outreach tools used.

One of the priorities developed in the workshops was a recommendation that the city adopt a comprehensive plan policy and goal calling for strategies for broader public participation and the assessment of obstacles for those for whom English is not a primary language.

Development of a task force to provide a one-stop-shop of information to address the needs and cultural concerns of the Hispanic community was also determined to be a priority. This joint effort between private and public agencies is working on establishing an interagency hotline to address Hispanic issues, developing a database of public agency bilingual staff members, and creating of brochures and handouts in Spanish.

Other recommendation from the workshops were: (1) MVTv, the city's television station, provide bilingual programming and use Spanish subtitles on English language programs, and (2) city services and information about other agencies be available in local Spanish language newspapers and on the radio station.

Other city public participation efforts include:

- Mount Vernon hosted a Town Meeting at which staff presented current and future projects, then opened the floor for discussion. More than 60 people attended the meeting at the Lincoln Theater, and countless others watched on MVTv. The meeting won the Honor Award for Citizen Involvement from the Washington Chapter of the American Planning Association.
- A presentation on what determines a livable community, led by Mark Hinshaw, FAIA, from LMN Architects in Seattle, was held. It included a discussion on density and good design.
- The city offers neighborhood block parties where planning division staff set up booths, provide information, and answer questions.
- City council meetings and educational programming are available on MVTv. Mayor Skye Richendrfer tapes a weekly television interview for MVTv.

## Washington Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development

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